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Joint NASTAD/NCSD Press Statement

NASTAD and NCSD Applaud CDC's Call for Comprehensive STD Prevention Services for Gay Men: "Dear Colleague" Letter Targets Public Health Officials, Private Physicians and Gay Leadership

Philadelphia. Today, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) called upon public health programs and private health care providers to offer comprehensive STD prevention services for sexually active gay men. In a letter signed by the Directors of the Division of HIV/ AIDS Prevention, the Division of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, the Division of Immunization Services and the Division of Viral Hepatitis, and released at the National STD Prevention Conference, the nation's leading public health experts urge clinicians to provide consistently all recommended STD prevention services to sexually active gay men.

Men who have sex with men (MSM) are at increased risk for multiple STDs including HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis A and hepatitis B. Numerous reports document high rates of STDs among MSM and suggest a resurgence in unsafe sexual practices among these men. In 2001 and 2002, syphilis cases among men increased dramatically in the United States; CDC estimates that over 40 percent of all cases in 2002 were among MSM. CDC has also documented syphilis outbreaks among gay men in several cities including Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, San Francisco and Seattle.

"The 'Dear Colleague' letter comes at a critical time for state and local public health officials battling increases in HIV and STD infections among gay men," said Julie Scofield, Executive Director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors. "Leadership from CDC is essential now to promote integrated preventive and clinical STD services for gay men at the local level."

The letter points to CDC's 2002 *STD Treatment Guidelines* which provide specific recommendations for STD prevention services that should be provided for all sexually active gay men and MSM. These services include, at minimum:

- Annual counseling and testing for HIV;
- Annual screening for syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia; and
- Vaccination against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

“This letter will help us to raise awareness among medical societies, physicians, community based organizations and advocacy groups about the need for full implementation of the *STD Treatment Guidelines*, “said Theresa Raphael, Executive Director of the National Coalition of STD Directors. “Health providers need to be proactive and diligent in both identifying and providing comprehensive health care to high risk patients.”

NASTAD and NCSD are actively working together to coordinate HIV, STD and hepatitis prevention efforts for gay men. We urge all stakeholders to work toward making available the full range of services that gay men need to protect their health.

NASTAD represents the nation’s chief state health agency staff who have programmatic responsibility for administering AIDS health care, prevention, education and supportive service programs funded by state and federal governments.

NCSD represents the Directors of public health sexually transmitted disease prevention programs in states, large cities/counties and territories of the United States, and advocates for effective policies, strategies, and sufficient resources to fight the spreads of sexually transmitted diseases.

Additional information and educational materials on STD prevention among MSM are available at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis, www.cdc.gov/std and www.cdc.gov/hiv; information on adult vaccination is available at www.cdc.gov/nip.